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## Military Service

Since their words would not have been believed, especially in wartime, [Japanese Americans] communicated by action and behavior. "We are good Americans," they said. "We are good neighbors. We are useful and productive citizens. We love America and are willing to die for her." These messages were communicated by the industry of workers and businessmen and farmers, by their service to the communities in which they live, by their behavior as good citizens, and by the war record of the 442nd. *It was a form of communication for which there is no verbal or symbolic substitute.*

—S. I. Hayakawa<sup>1</sup>

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the War Department stopped taking Japanese Americans into the military, and many already in service were released. Almost from the beginning, two institutions were exempt: the Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) and the 100th Battalion. By early 1943, when Nisei volunteers were again accepted, a new Nisei unit was formed, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Many Nisei also contributed in other capacities throughout the war.

Approximately 33,000 Nisei served in the military during World War II.<sup>2</sup> Although many had come from the camps where their families were still detained, Nisei service was extraordinarily heroic. At war's end, their valor and the public tributes heaped upon them did much to hasten the acceptance of ethnic Japanese released from the camps:



the question of loyalty had been most powerfully answered by a battlefield record of courage and sacrifice.

## THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE LANGUAGE SCHOOL

In the spring of 1941, a few alert Army intelligence officers realized that, if war came, the Army would need Japanese language interpreters and translators. After much delay, Lieut. Col. John Weckerling and Capt. Kai Rasmussen won approval to start a small school for training persons with some background in Japanese. On November 1, 1941, the school opened at Crissy Field in San Francisco with four Nisei instructors and 60 students, 58 of whom were Japanese Americans.<sup>3</sup> The attack on Pearl Harbor confirmed the value of the program. During the spring of 1942, while evacuation was proceeding, the school was enlarged and transferred to Camp Savage in Minnesota.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the first group had completed training, and 35 of its graduates went to the Pacific—half to Guadalcanal and half to the Aleutian Islands.<sup>5</sup>

The school, now renamed the Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) and officially part of the War Department, began its first class at Camp Savage in June 1942 with 200 students.<sup>6</sup> By the end of 1942, more than 100 Nisei had left for the Pacific.<sup>7</sup> By Fall 1944, over 1,600 had graduated.<sup>8</sup> When the school closed in 1946, after being moved once more to Fort Snelling, Minnesota, it had trained 6,000 men. Of these, 3,700 served in combat areas before the Japanese surrender. Ironically, the often-mistrusted Kibei—Japanese Americans who had received formal education in Japan—proved most qualified for the interpreter's task; most Nisei had too little facility with Japanese to be useful.<sup>9</sup> As Mark Murakami pointed out:

[On] the one hand the Japanese Americans were condemned for having the linguistic and cultural knowledge of Japanese, and on the other hand the knowledge they had was capitalized on and used as a secret weapon by the Army and Naval Intelligence.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning, MISLS graduates were poorly used in the Pacific. A few ended up fighting rather than using their rare language talent. Others were sent to remote, inactive outposts or were ineffectively employed by the Army.<sup>11</sup> As the war went on, however, the situation improved as the Army learned how to use this valuable specialized resource.



Many of the linguists worked in teams, translating captured documents at intelligence centers around the Pacific. Large groups, for example, were posted in Australia, New Delhi and Hawaii.<sup>12</sup> Their assignments included battle plans, defense maps, tactical orders, intercepted messages and diaries. From these, American commanders could anticipate enemy action, evaluate strengths and weaknesses, avoid surprise, and strike unexpectedly.<sup>13</sup> The Nisei's first major accomplishment was translation of a document picked up on Guadalcanal; it completely listed Imperial Navy ships with their call signs and code names, and did the same for the Japanese Navy's air squadrons and bases.<sup>14</sup> Among other accomplishments was translation of the entire Japanese naval battle plan for the Philippines as well as plans for defending the island.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to rear-echelon duties, language school graduates took part in combat, adding to their other duties interrogating enemy prisoners and persuading enemy soldiers to surrender. The first Nisei to help the Allies in actual combat through his language ability was Richard Sakakida, who translated a captured set of Japanese plans for a landing on Bataan early in the war; American tanks were able to move up and ambush the invaders as they arrived.<sup>16</sup> One early group of linguists in a combat zone went to the Aleutian Islands.<sup>17</sup> The linguists took part in every landing in the bitter island-hopping campaign through New Guinea, the Marianas, the Philippines and Okinawa, and participated in surrender ceremonies in Tokyo Bay.<sup>18</sup> Nisei linguists served with about 130 different Army and Navy units, with the Marine Corps, and they were loaned to combat forces from Australia, New Zealand, England and China.<sup>19</sup> Arthur Morimitsu's experiences make clear the range of demands on the linguists:

This unit later joined other units to form the Mars Task Force, a commando unit. The mission was to cut off the enemy supply and reinforcements miles behind enemy lines along the Burma Road.

We served as interpreters, questioned prisoners, translated the captured documents. We also worked as mule skimmers, volunteered for patrol duty with advanced units and brought down dead and wounded soldiers from the battlefields.

After we completed our duties with the Mars Task Force, I was sent back to New Delhi, India, assigned to the OSS, Office of Strategic Services, as head of a detachment of Nisei MIS to interrogate Japanese prisoners in preparation for the invasion of Japan.<sup>20</sup>

After the surrender, MISLS shifted to civil matters, and its graduates helped to occupy and reconstruct Japan. They interpreted for



military government teams, located and repatriated imprisoned Americans, and interpreted at the war crimes trials.<sup>21</sup> Despite their importance—General Willoughby, MacArthur's chief of intelligence, has said that the work of the Nisei MIS shortened the Pacific war by two years<sup>22</sup>—these accomplishments got little publicity; most were classified information during the war. Instead, the highly-publicized exploits of the 100th Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team in Europe first helped to show where Nisei loyalty clearly lay.

## THE 100TH BATTALION

The 100th Battalion began as part of the Hawaii National Guard. As evacuation plans were formulated on the mainland, the War Department also debated the best way to handle ethnic Japanese in Hawaii.<sup>23</sup> On February 1, 1942, Hawaiian Commander Lieut. General Delos Emmons learned to his dismay that the War Department wanted to release the Nisei from active duty. He needed the manpower and had been impressed with the desire of many Hawaiian Nisei to prove their loyalty. After much discussion, Emmons recommended that a special Nisei Battalion be formed and removed to the mainland; General Marshall concurred. By June 5, 1942, 1,432 men—soon to be known as the 100th Battalion—had sailed.<sup>24</sup> The battalion went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, for training and later to Camp Shelby in Mississippi. Over a year later, the group finally was ordered to North Africa, arriving on September 2, 1943.<sup>25</sup>

From North Africa, the 100th immediately went north to Italy, promptly going into combat at Salerno on September 26.<sup>26</sup> From then until March 1944, the 100th plunged into the bloody campaign which moved the Allies slowly up the Italian peninsula. The 100th suffered heavy casualties; 78 men were killed and 239 wounded or injured in the first month and a half alone.<sup>27</sup> By the time the 100th finally pulled out, its effective strength was down to 521 men.<sup>28</sup> The battalion had earned 900 Purple Hearts and the nickname "Purple Heart Battalion."<sup>29</sup> As Warren Fencel, who fought near the 100th, said of it:

The only time they ever had a desertion was from the hospital to get back to the front.<sup>30</sup>

After a brief rest, the 100th was sent into the offensive from the Anzio beachhead, where it soon joined the other Nisei unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.



## THE 442ND REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

While the 100th Battalion fought its way through Italy, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team had been formed and trained in Camp Shelby. Composed of volunteers from Hawaii and the mainland, many of whom came directly from relocation centers, the team trained from October 1943 to February 1944. Small groups left regularly to replace men from the 100th. On June 2, the 442nd landed at Naples and moved immediately to the beaches of Anzio. When the 442nd arrived, the 100th had already pushed toward Rome and engaged in heavy fighting. On June 15, the two came together and the 100th formally became part of the 442nd.<sup>31</sup>

The 442nd fought through Belvedere, Luciana, and Livorno during the first half of the summer, finally pulling back for rest in late July. On July 27, Lieut. General Mark W. Clark, Commander of the Fifth Army, awarded the 100th a Presidential Unit Citation and commended the other units for their performance during the month, saying:<sup>32</sup>

You are always thinking of your country before yourselves. You have never complained through your long periods in the line. You have written a brilliant chapter in the history of the fighting men in America. You are always ready to close with the enemy, and you have always defeated him. The 34th Division is proud of you, the Fifth Army is proud of you, and the whole United States is proud of you.<sup>33</sup>

On August 15, the 442nd went back into combat. Their first objective, to cross the Arno River, was accomplished early in September. Once again, the cost was great, for the unit's casualties totalled 1,272—more than one-fourth of its total strength.<sup>34</sup>

From the Arno the 442nd moved to France to join the attack on the Vosges Mountains.<sup>35</sup> Its first assignment was to take the town of Bruyeres, which was won after three days of bitter fighting. Describing the encounter, the Seventh Army reported:

Bruyeres will long be remembered, for it was the most viciously fought-for town we had encountered in our long march against the Germans. The enemy defended it house by house, giving up a yard only when it became so untenable they could no longer hope to hold it.<sup>36</sup>

In the same month the 442nd encountered its bloodiest battle—rescue of the “Lost Battalion.”<sup>37</sup> Deep in the Vosges and meeting heavy German resistance, the 442nd was ordered to find and bring back a Texan battalion trapped nine miles away. For six days, the 442nd fought



enemy infantry, artillery and tanks through forests and mountain ridges until it reached the Lost Battalion, suffering 800 casualties in a single week.<sup>38</sup> They then pushed on for ten more days to take the ridge that was the Lost Battalion's original objective.<sup>39</sup> From Bruyeres through the Vosges, the combat team had been cut to less than half its original strength. The casualty list numbered 2,000, of whom 140 had been killed.<sup>40</sup> After another month of fighting, the 442nd finally came out of the line to rest.<sup>41</sup> Sam Ozaki described arriving to join the 442nd after this engagement:

The four others went overseas with the original 442nd. I joined them later as a replacement. I remember November 1944, when the replacements joined the 442nd, after they had pulled back from the Battle of Bruyeres, the lost battalion. I went looking for my buddies. I found one, Ted. Harry had been in a hospital, had been sent back to a hospital with a wound. The two others had been killed in action, saving the lost battalion.<sup>42</sup>

After a relatively quiet winter of 1944-45 in the south of France, the 442nd moved back to Italy in March 1945. During its first assignment, to take a line of ridges, Pfc. Sadao Munemori took over his squad from a wounded leader. After destroying machine guns twenty feet ahead, he saw an enemy grenade fall into a nearby shellhole and dove on top of it, dying while saving his comrades. For this heroism Munemori received posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor.<sup>43</sup> The 442nd now advanced into the rugged and heavily fortified Apennines. In a surprise attack following a secret all-night ascent through the mountains, the 442nd took their assigned peaks, thereby cracking the German defensive line.<sup>44</sup> A diversionary move had turned into a full-scale offensive;<sup>45</sup> from there, the unit continued northward until, on April 25, German resistance broke. By May 2, the war in Italy was over and, by May 9, the Germans had surrendered.<sup>46</sup>

In seven major campaigns, the 442nd took 9,486 casualties—more than 300 percent of its original infantry strength, including 600 killed. More than 18,000 men served with the unit.<sup>47</sup> Commenting on the painful loss of many fellow Nisei in the European theater, Masato Nakagawa admitted that “it was a high price to pay,” but “[i]t was to prove our loyalty which was by no means an easy [task].”<sup>48</sup> The 442nd was one of the war's most decorated combat teams, receiving seven Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations and earning 18,143 individual decorations—including one Congressional Medal of Honor, 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, 350 Silver Stars, 810 Bronze Stars and more than 3,600 Purple Hearts. As President Truman told members



of the 442nd as he fastened the Presidential Unit banner to their regimental colors, these Nisei fought "not only the enemy, but prejudice."<sup>49</sup>

## OTHER NISEI SERVICE

Although the 442nd's exploits are the most celebrated Nisei contribution to the war, many others played effective roles. FBI-trained Nisei operatives in the prewar Philippines kept the Japanese population under surveillance. Others escaped the Army's segregation policy and served in other combat units. One Nisei even became an Air Force gunner and flew bombing missions over Tokyo. A small group served with Merrill's Marauders in Burma and a few were involved in the surrender of China.<sup>50</sup>

Numerous others served in less glamorous but equally critical jobs. There were Nisei medics, mechanics and clerks in the Quartermaster Corps and Nisei women in the WACs. Nisei and Issei served as language instructors, employees in the Army Map Service, and behind the scenes in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and Office of War Information (OWI).<sup>51</sup> In the latter groups were primarily younger Issei who had fled Japan after World War I to avoid political persecution. At OWI and OSS, some made broadcasts to Japan, while others wrote propaganda leaflets urging Japanese troops to surrender or pamphlets dropped over Japan to weaken civilian morale.<sup>52</sup>

## IMPACT OF THE NISEI MILITARY RECORD

Although the exploits of the 442nd and 100th Battalion were publicized during the war, returning veterans still faced harassment and discrimination. Night riders warned Mary Masuda, whose brother had earned a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross, not to return to her home. A barber refused to give Captain Daniel Inouye a haircut.<sup>53</sup> Mitsuo Usui's story is one that probably typifies the experiences of many returning veterans:

Coming home, I was boarding a bus on Olympic Boulevard. A lady sitting in the front row of the bus, saw me and said, "Damn Jap." Here I was a proud American soldier, just coming back with

my new uniform and new paratrooper boots, with all my campaign medals and awards, proudly displayed on my chest, and this? The bus driver upon hearing this remark, stopped the bus and said, "Lady, apologize to this American soldier or get off my bus"—She got off the bus.

Embarrassed by the situation, I turned around to thank the bus driver. He said that's okay, buddy, everything is going to be okay from now on out. Encouraged by his comment, I thanked him and as I was turning away, I noticed a discharge pin on his lapel.<sup>54</sup>

Men who had served with Nisei brought home stories of their heroism, and War Department officials praised the valuable service of the 442nd.<sup>55</sup> The WRA sponsored speaking tours by returning veterans and officers who had served with them.<sup>56</sup> On July 15, 1946, the men of the 442nd were received on the White House lawn by President Truman, who spoke eloquently of their bravery.<sup>57</sup> In a few cases, military service led directly to community acceptance. In August 1946, *The Houston Press* ran a story about Sergeant George Otsuka, who had helped rescue the Lost Battalion, a Texas outfit, and was now being told to "keep away" from a farm he planned to purchase. Public response to the story was strong, and Sergeant Otsuka had no further trouble moving to his farm.<sup>58</sup> Even on the West Coast, it was difficult to continue abusing veterans with an excellent record.

The Nisei had indeed distinguished themselves. As the acerbic and distinguished General Joseph Stilwell said of Japanese Americans:

They bought an awful hunk of America with their blood. . . . you're damn right those Nisei boys have a place in the American heart, now and forever. We cannot allow a single injustice to be done to the Nisei without defeating the purposes for which we fought.<sup>59</sup>